



Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Meeting Minutes - **Draft**

Representative Town Meeting

Moderator Scott L. Newsome, Representatives Karin Adams, Robert Bailey, Jeanne Baker, Joe Baril, Alicia T. Bauer, Rafael Burgos, Jr., Clarence Casper, Lynn Crockett Hubbard, Susan Deane-Shinbrot, Jim Evans, Thomas A. Frickman, Bob Garcia, Nancy Gilly, Matthew G. Longino, Jim Loughlin, Emily Maher, Brandon Marley, Jackie Massett, Lisa McCabe, Bruce A. McDermott, Roscoe L. Merritt, Jim Nault, Kathy Neugent, Lian Obrey, Juliette M. Parker, Richard J. Pasqualini, Jr., Carolann Quinn, Dutcha Sliker-Hersant, Joan Steinfeld, Irma J. Streeter, James L. Streeter, Archie Swindell, Patricia Wagner, Lori A. Watrous, Gary Welles, Ivy R. Williams, and Jonathan Wilson.

Wednesday, November 16, 2016

7:00 PM

Groton Senior Center

SPECIAL MEETING

A. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Moderator Newsome, Rep. Adams, Rep. Bailey, Rep. Baker, Rep. Baril, Rep. Casper, Rep. Conley, Rep. Hubbard, Rep. Evans, Rep. Frickman, Rep. Sliker-Hersant, Rep. Maher, Rep. Marley, Rep. McDermott, Rep. Nault, Rep. Neugent, Rep. Parker, Rep. Quinn, Rep. Steinfeld, Rep. Welles and Rep. Wilson

Members Absent: Rep. Bauer, Rep. Burgos, Jr., Rep. Cini, Rep. Deane-Shinbrot, Rep. Garcia, Rep. Gilly, Rep. Longino, Rep. Loughlin, Rep. Massett, Rep. McCabe, Rep. Merritt, Rep. Obrey, Rep. Pasqualini Jr., Rep. Streeter, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Swindell, Rep. Wagner, Rep. Watrous and Rep. Williams

Also present was Mayor Bruce Flax, Councilor Dean G. Antipas, Councilor Diane Barber, Councilor Greg Grim, Councilor Karen Morton, Councilor Bonnie Nault, Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Finance Director Cindy Landry, Public Works Director Gary Schenider, Director of OPDS Jonathan Reiner, Deputy Police Chief Paul Gately, Parks and Recreation Director Mark Berry, and Human Resources Director Robert Zagami.

B. Discussion of meeting goals (Mayor Flax/Moderator Newsome)

Mayor Flax welcomed the members of the RTM and Town Council and thanked the department heads that were in attendance. He introduced himself and asked that everyone at the table do the same. He explained that he had a meeting with Moderator Newsome and it was decided that a joint meeting to discuss budget issues would be beneficial to discuss how to make the budget process more efficient.

Moderator Newsome concurred that not everyone will agree in the matter of the budget. He explained that he hoped that what would come out of the meeting would be a more productive budget process for both the Town of Groton and for the people who work for the Town of Groton. He thanked everyone for coming out to the special joint meeting. He explained some of his goals and the format for the meeting. He stated that the meeting would be informal but that the RTM Rules of Decorum still apply.

C. Review of budget process (Town Manager Oefinger)

Town Manager Oefinger provided handouts that included a review of the unaudited preliminary results of the Town Operations for the FYE 2017; basic information explaining the governmental structure of the Town of Groton; excerpts from the Town Charter describing the process for preparing, reviewing, adoption and amending the budget; and Moody's Investors Service annual comments on the Town of Groton.

D. Financial predictions for FYE 2018 (Town Manager Oefinger)

Town Manager Oefinger reviewed a memorandum that Finance Director Cindy Landry had prepared for the Town Council. This memo was shared with the members present and is on file

with the Town Clerk.

E. Open discussion on budget process for FYE 2018

Moderator Scott Newsome opened the discussion by reviewing past revenue loss, and he asked the Town Manager Oefinger if he expected any large scale reductions in revenue. Town Manager stated that he was not aware of any large scale reductions. Moderator Newsome explained that during the FYE 2016 budget process, the RTM and Town Council fully funded the Planning Department requests in hope of bolstering economic activity in town. He stated that as a result, there are a lot of new opportunities and businesses interested in Groton.

Rep. Kathy Neugent agreed with Moderator Newsome's statements. She stated that the Town had to absorb the loss of \$1million in State aid and about a \$1.2 million loss in revenue as a result of the destruction of the Pfizer building 118. She stated that barring another large reduction from the State, the Town should be in good shape if services are kept the same. She suggested that we should fund core services and fund some CIP projects, if possible.

Rep. Christine Conley stated that the Town department heads develop the budget and the Town Council approves a budget before the Town is certain of our revenues. She stated that the RTM gets the budget and often they are left to reduce the budget. She suggested that the Town needs to have a better ability to forecast our projected revenues.

Town Manager Oefinger stated that the Town was aware of the shortfalls in revenue going into the process. He stated that was the reason there was an increase. He stated that decisions must be made as to what service should be funded.

Councilor Dean Antipas explained that when people are considering opening a business in Groton, they are looking for financial stability. He suggested that the Town Council should continue to review the details of the each department and the RTM should consider the budget in any manner they choose.

In response to Rep. Jean Baker's question, Town Manager Oefinger stated that traditionally with each re-evaluation, the mill rate may go down, but the value of your house may increase or decrease. He stated that he could not predict whether taxes will increase this year. Rep. Baker stated that Groton is a great place to locate a business and to live.

Councilor Nault stated that she attended a CCM Conference where there was a presentation by the National League of Cities and learned of a dismal State projection. She stated that the Town should not expect more money from the State and we should be prepared for less.

In response to Rep. Clarence Casper's statement, Town Manager Mark Oefinger explained that revenue information is shown for each department in their individual budgets. Rep. Casper stated that cuts to revenue-generating departments could have an impact. He stated that he would like more detail to be included in each department regarding revenue, including insurance and benefits for employees.

Rep. Bruce McDermott stated that the City Public Safety budget is not laid out the same as the Town Public Safety budget. He stated that it is difficult to compare the services from one to the other. He stated that the Police Evaluation Study from 2013 suggested that the City of Groton and Groton Long Point should present their budgets in the same manner as the Town.

Mayor Flax suggested that the group consider discussing the format for budget deliberations. He suggested that RTM Committee Chairs should attend Town Council budget sessions and Town Councilors should attend RTM Committee meetings.

Rep. Christine Conley stated that the process with which the RTM Committee meetings are

scheduled works well, but that the Town Council does not take in to consideration the dates for these meetings when scheduling their meetings. She suggested that the meeting dates for the Town Council be distributed as soon as possible.

It was agreed that both the Town Council and RTM will try to do a better job of scheduling and attend each other's meetings

Councilor Nault suggested to have the department heads brief the RTM and Town Council together. She stated that deliberations could be separate. She stated that this would eliminate changes to the presentation because of duplication.

Rep. McDermott agreed with Councilor Nault's suggestion.

Moderator Newsome stated that the RTM Education Committee attends the Board of Education budget review sessions. He stated that RTM members are encouraged to participate and to ask questions. He stated that this enables the RTM committee to expedite their decisions.

Councilor Morton explained that with having separate presentations, department heads decisions can fine tune any issues that were pointed out at the Town Council session. She stated that sometimes the two groups are voting on very different presentations. She stated that she supports one presentation to both bodies.

Rep. Joan Steinfeld stated that for many years she attended all of the Town Council budget sessions. She stated that it was rare for her to have an opportunity to ask questions. She stated that she normally serves on two RTM committees and that the information that she gets from the Town Council meeting is extremely valuable. She stated that she did not notice any difference with the Public Works presentation when it was presented to the RTM.

Mayor Flax stated that he believed that RTM members would be permitted to participate in asking questions during the Town Council budget sessions. He stated that it is important to concentrate on scheduling the presentations so that as many members of both bodies can attend. He stated that two Town Councilors should attend the RTM committee meetings in order to explain the Town Council's position.

Councilor Nault suggested that all members from each body attend one budget session for each department presentation. She stated that this may take more time, but that this would eliminate duplication.

Rep. Gary Welles stated that he attended the Public Works department portion of the Town Council budget sessions. He stated that the Town Council continued the accounts to another meeting, which he watched on television.

F. Actions and agreements (Mayor Flax/Moderator Newsome)

Rep. McDermott suggested that he email the Town Council Public Works schedule to his committee members on the RTM. He stated that this may help accelerate the budget process.

Rep. Neugent stated that if the RTM members are asking questions at the Town Council meetings, the meetings may be a lot longer, which would mean that more meetings would be necessary. She stated that the Committees would still need to meet in order to vote. She stated that there would not be any staff at the RTM Committee meeting.

Moderator Newsome stated that Town staff would attend both Town Council and RTM Committee meetings, but that the meetings should be shortened because most of the material had been reviewed at the Town Council meeting.

In response to Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher, Moderator Newsome stated that RTM committees would still have to meet in order to vote on their portion of the budget.

In response to Town Manager Oefinger's statement that the RTM is meeting earlier and earlier, Town Clerk Moukawsher stated that the Town Council is taking longer to get through their budget process.

Moderator Newsome stated that if the RTM waited until the Town Council had finished with their deliberations on the budget, the RTM would not have enough time for all of their committees to meetings and deliberate.

Finance Director Cindy Landry stated that what should be avoided is the RTM committees voting on the Town Manager's number without knowing what the Town Council's figure is. She said that it is confusing at the RTM meeting for the committee to present a figure that is not the same as the Town Council number.

Mayor Flax stated that there is a consensus that RTM members should try to attend the Town Council budget session when their committee items are discussed and at least two Town Councilors should attend the RTM committee meetings. He stated another suggestion that he and the Moderator had discussed is that the computer and vehicle funds should be considered as specific amounts.

Moderator Newsome stated that we need to be mindful of the time and energy that is put into the CIP budgets by Town staff. He suggested a second list of additional CIPs for the future. He suggested that Capital Improvement Plan items be included in the actual department budget along with a list of the CIPs. In addition, RTM sub committees should try to schedule their meetings after the Town Council has acted.

In response to Rep. Wilson, Mayor Flax suggested that priorities be set and funded through the CIP items. Rep. Wilson stated that it would not be appropriate to set a cap for funding because that may limit what is marked as a priority. He stated that a list of priorities should be decided before the RTM reviews the budget.

Mayor Flax stated that the RTM may not agree with the Town Council's list of priorities. He explained that if all of the CIPs are listed, it artificially inflates the budget. He is just suggesting a more realistic approach to reviewing CIP budgets.

Rep. Conley stated that another town that she is familiar with meets in January to identify their priority CIP budgets.

Town Manager Oefinger stated that CIP discussions could be addressed long before the actual budget presentations.

In response to Rep. Wilson, Mayor Flax stated that across the board decisions are being made for vehicle and computer fund balances. He stated that those funds are carrying balances year to year. He stated that the cost of computers drastically changes year after year. He questioned whether both bodies would want to continue funding these accounts in this manner. He suggested that they have a CIP type of discussion in the near future.

Rep. Baker stated that as a new member she did not understand the rationale for some of the Town Council cuts. In response to Rep. Baker's second question on whether the FYE 2018 budget will not be impacted by the 2020 School Plan, Town Manager Oefinger stated that it will not be impacted, except if the Town Council decides to start funding the design work at risk or wait until the State signs off on everything. He stated that there may be savings if work begins sooner rather

than later. He stated that architectural work would be reimbursed if the State signs off on the project and if all the pieces are in place.

Councilor Antipas explained that the reductions to the Public Works budgets are to be attributed to employee openings.

Moderator Newsome stated that he plans to distribute a points page of the items discussed this evening.

Councilor Morton stated that she believes that this year will be another tough year and that each department must examine what is necessary and what can be reduced.

Moderator Newsome thanked everyone for attending the meeting, which was met with applause.

G. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Attest:

*Betsy Moukawsher
Groton Town Clerk
Clerk of the Town Council
Clerk of the RTM*